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Bay Area Air Quality Management District  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission

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## Joint Policy Committee / Regional Planning Program

### ITEM #7

Date: April 4, 2005

To: Joint Policy Committee

From: Regional Planning Program Director

Subject: Regional Planning Work Program, First Six-Month Progress Report

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At its meeting of September 24, 2004, the JPC approved an initial work program for what was then the joint ABAG-MTC regional planning program. Included in that program was a progress report scheduled for April 2005. This is that report.

As I anticipated in my September report to the JPC, the initial work program has been a learning exercise. No one, no where has had experience with a multi-agency regional planning program quite like this one. The first few months have involved a great deal of exploration: of what is and what is possible. As with most exploration, not all of the paths have led to goldmines, and this is reflected in mixed results relative to some of our initial objectives. However, we now have a much better appreciation of the territory and are positioned for substantial advances over the next few months.

One very pleasant surprise is how well the Joint Policy Committee members have worked together. I have seen few signs of the inter-agency acrimony I was warned to expect. The members of the Committee deserve a great deal of credit for rapidly getting down to the business of regional planning, leaving past conflicts behind.

In the first six-month program, there was a heavy emphasis on the Regional Planning Program Director as the primary staff resource. While the Task Force report which set up the JPC assumed staff contributions from each of the member agencies, we did not want to disrupt work programs in MTC or ABAG that were committed before my arrival. Our expectation was that over time we would build to more joint work program activities, involving fairly substantial resource commitments from the member organizations—but only as previous commitments were completed. We are just now reaching the point where a refocusing of agency efforts is possible.

The first six-month program had eight elements. Progress is reported below relative to the objective for each element.

- 1. Objective: Initiate process for local confirmation of the regional vision (Smart Growth Strategy / Regional Livability Footprint Project) and local implementation of a voluntary regional interest statement for major project review.**

I prepared a draft voluntary regional interest statement for major project review (the *Smart-Growth Checklist*), but an attempt to pursue local confirmation of the regional vision through local planning directors did not work out. Potential participants were

unenthusiastic and skeptical, and it became obvious that more was required to get local governments to meaningful commitment.

As several JPC members have observed, nominal confirmation of the vision will not achieve the level of local commitment which the JPC is seeking and which the region needs. Localities need to buy-in to the vision with actions as well as words. I am, therefore, working with the agency executive directors on a proposal for establishing a capability to make meaningful connections with local governments on the smart-growth initiative and on pursuing the initiative through these connections over a continuing period. This involves explicit recognition that effective pursuit of the vision through local governments cannot be a one-shot deal. There will need to be consistent and vigorous follow-up to support local initiatives and to ensure that smart growth is actually happening. Within resource constraints, we are looking at ways of establishing an assured capacity for an effective local-government connection with continuing follow-through.

**2. Objective: Prepare ABAG-MTC regional planning bill proposals and legislative strategy for 2005-2006 session of the State Legislature.**

The JPC approved an initial consolidated legislative approach at its September meeting. The expectation was that this approach would not bear fruit until 2006. However, we have identified several bills introduced in 2005 that are consistent with the JPC's directions and upon which we can build. These are being pursued through normal agency legislative channels, but with increased communication among the three member agencies. We have also initiated an informal mechanism to share notes with other Bay Area organizations pursuing smart-growth legislation, and have enhanced our ability to respond to legislative opportunities.

**3. Objective: Provide JPC review and comment on pre-existing MTC or ABAG work program items related to implementation of the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project.**

The JPC has had an opportunity to review and comment on several member-agency initiatives related to the implementation of the regional smart-growth vision. Principal among these, of course, is MTC's draft Transit-Oriented Development Policy. The JPC has become the central and primary locus of TOD policy review and refinement and is expected to make recommendations to MTC around mid year.

The JPC has also reviewed ABAG's policy-based *Projections 2005* and smart-growth monitoring program and has looked at the implications of smart growth on MTC's transportation modeling results. The JPC has received a presentation on the *Bay Area Ozone Strategy*, upon which it will ultimately have to recommend; and it has taken preparatory looks at the *Regional Transportation Plan* and at new requirements related to the *Regional Housing Needs Determination*. Bill 849 requires that the JPC play a major role in the preparation of all these documents. In anticipation of an eventual need

to refine the smart-growth strategy, the Committee has also received a presentation on land-use requirements related to regional goods movement.

**4. Objective: Develop a mechanism and process for regional planning comment on significant projects.**

In December, the JPC received a report describing present and past practices for reviewing and commenting on significant projects, analyzing options for returning to a more active review and comment role, and recommending an initial cautious approach. There was not a consensus on the recommendation, and therefore an alternative tack is required. We are exploring the possibility of testing out a more assertive review and comment model through a few well-selected test cases. These will help us all better understand the role which regional review and comment might play in assisting both the regional interest and local governments.

**5. Objective: Develop a communication strategy to build wider understanding and support for the regional planning vision.**

We have been monitoring the responses to the TOD outreach program and to various other “smart-growth” developments around the region to get a better handle on public information gaps and communication needs. This will assist in building a more informed communication strategy at the appropriate time, which we suspect is sometime after we build a better connection with local governments. We have concluded that those governments have a very important role to play in whatever vision-related public communication we eventually undertake. We have noted that there is a vast amount of smart-growth information out there, much reported in mainstream media. Our task will be to focus on new, value-added communication uniquely motivating for the Bay Area.

In the interim, we have undertaken a few communication efforts to explain the JPC and its role and in that process provide some background on the vision and its rationale. This has mostly consisted of presentations to groups and conferences and an occasional media interview. The JPC web site started out as an afterthought, but now has been reorganized to provide a consistent and reliable source of information about the Joint Policy Committee and its work.

**6. Objective: Assemble implementation tool kit.**

The “tool kit” has grown into a “tool store.” After I began to research implementation tools, I quickly realized that there is a wealth of smart-growth resources out there—some even specific to the Bay Area—and we do not need to reinvent or even republish these under our brand. The most helpful thing we can do is provide an intelligent and organized mechanism for accessing the existing resources. I have, therefore, designed a simple interactive database structure that permits one to select and quickly review a list of potentially relevant resources by tool or topic. The structure has been implemented with an initial database that is structured to grow as we discover additional useful resources. I judge this electronic database approach to be much more useful than

putting together a standard book, which has a limited shelf life and may or may not have applicability to issues users are facing at any particular moment in time.

Sharing the database among member agencies and with the broader Bay Area planning and development community cannot occur until ABAG completes some improvements to his database-related web-hosting facilities to deal with security issues presented by the database's interactivity. Work on this cannot begin until mid or late summer. In the meantime, I will continue to grow the database and refine its structure. Although sharing the database with others has proven more difficult than I had hoped, it has already benefited other work on, for example, understanding and organizing the existing universe of smart-growth incentives.

#### **7. Objective: Identify areas of focus for regional implementation resources.**

This objective has been subsumed under a broader objective of reallocating regional planning resources to serve the joint program. The manner in which resources are focused depends on the quantity of resources available to focus. The three executive directors and I are actively discussing the realignment of regional planning resources as mandated by the MTC-ABAG Task Force final report and SB 849. We hope to report back to you soon.

#### **8. Objective: Initiate monitoring and evaluation.**

I built a small data set and undertook a study to monitor and evaluate one aspect of the region's implementation of smart growth: this is the production of new, higher-density, multi-family housing. The data set can be updated on a regular basis, and will provide a continuing tool for tracking progress on this important smart-growth variable.

However, I also determined that there is a dearth of readily available administrative data that will help us track many other important, but more subtle aspects of smart growth, particularly between decennial censuses and at a level of detail appropriate to the Vision's "Network of Neighborhoods."

The ABAG Research Department has a preliminary smart-growth monitoring program in place, concentrating at the moment on local-government policy surveys, and will report to the JPC soon on an initiative to improve this program. The ABAG Planning Department has applied for a grant which would permit it to explore the expansion of monitoring with the participation of other Bay Area organizations interested in smart growth and sustainable development.

#### **Second Six Months**

While there has been substantial progress, none of the objectives identified in September has been absolutely completed and all remain important to Vision implementation. It is appropriate to continue to maintain these objectives as guideposts for the second six months of the JPC

regional planning program. Four priority areas require particular emphasis over the next one-half year:

1. Development of an appropriately resourced and assured capability to work directly with local governments on smart-growth implementation, in association with the resolution of multi-agency resource allocation as required by the ABAG-MTC Task Force final report and SB 849;
2. Completion and initial implementation of the TOD policy;
3. Completion and publication of the on-line database of smart-growth resources;
4. Maximum positive influence over the opportunities provided by new legislation.

Recommendation

I RECOMMEND:

THAT the JPC confirm the above objectives and priorities to guide the second six months of the JPC Regional Planning Program.